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BUREAU DE L'ÉDUCATION FRANÇAISE

FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE
Reading and Writing Assessment
Grade 6
1988

Summary Report

NOVEMBER 1990

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FOREWORD

In May 1988, grade six students in Franco-Manitoban schools participated in the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE provincial Reading and Writing Assessment. This assessment included three components: (1) two tests dealing with the objectives of the curriculum; (2) two surveys of grade six students; (3) a survey of grade six French teachers.

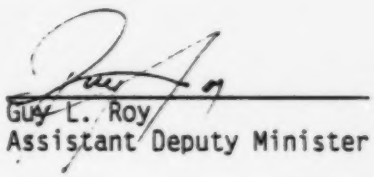
The provincial FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE Reading and Writing Assessment was an initiative of the Bureau de l'éducation française. Educational Support Services was responsible for the project. However, teachers and curriculum consultants were involved throughout the evaluation process.

A Preliminary Report was published in October 1988. It contained the students' results for the reading and writing assessment, but did not contain an analysis or interpretation of the data.

A copy of the Final Report (1990) was sent to all school divisions and schools. This document provides a detailed presentation of the results for the three components of the assessment along with recommendations made on the basis of the data and the interpretation thereof. It also contains all the tests and all the analyses in detail.

This Summary Report (1990) provides a general review of the analyses and all recommendations. Additional information can be obtained by consulting the Final Report which was sent to schools and school divisions.

We encourage all persons who are concerned with the quality of students' written communication skills to read this report, discuss the recommendations with others and send their comments to the Bureau de l'éducation française.



Guy L. Roy
Assistant Deputy Minister

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We would like to extend sincere thanks to all those who participated directly or indirectly in the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE Reading and Writing Assessment.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Henri GRIMARD, Director of Educational Support Services with the Bureau de l'éducation française, as well as the contribution of the members of the Technical Committee (instrument development and data interpretation):

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BACKGROUND

In October 1986, the Bureau de l'éducation française decided to conduct a provincial reading and writing assessment of FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE at the grade 6 level.

Goals

The goals of this provincial assessment project of FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE were to:

- provide the Department of Education and Training, the public and educators with information on the extent to which the objectives of the "FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 4e, 5e et 6e années, version provisoire 1986", curriculum have been met;
- gather data to improve the curriculum;
- promote or sustain an interest in a quality language of communication among students, parents, educators and school administrators;
- help teachers improve their student evaluation skills;
- inform school divisions, upon request, of the extent to which curriculum objectives have been met in their schools.

Criterion-referenced testing

In order to describe the students' performance as relating to the objectives of the curriculum, criterion-referenced testing was chosen over norm-referenced testing.

Development and Pilot testing

The tests and surveys were developed by a committee of professionals from the field of education, appointed by the Bureau de l'éducation française. The tests were then validated in four Franco-Manitoban schools (rural and urban) in the spring of 1987.

Administration and correction

The tests were administered by the teachers to all grade 6 students in all Franco-Manitoban schools, and sent to the Bureau de l'éducation française to be marked.

Interpretation of results

The Bureau de l'éducation française established a committee to study and interpret the test data. This Summary Report provides a synthesis of this interpretation, as well as all the recommendations made by the committee.

READING ASSESSMENT

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

TEST DESCRIPTION

For the written comprehension test, students were required to read seven texts which included the following types of messages:

- informative,
- expressive,
- persuasive,
- poetic.

Once the students had read each of the texts, they were required to answer a variety of questions including multiple choice, associations, and short answer questions.

The texts or questions began with a brief introduction which served to clarify the purpose of the communication.

Lastly, following the test, the students were asked to answer a survey.

EVALUATED OBJECTIVES

The 68 items included in the written comprehension test are divided into 11 sub-tests, each of which corresponds to an objective of the Programme d'études, FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 4e, 5e et 6e années, document provisoire, 1986.

SUB-TESTS (objectives)	Item numbers indicated by type of message			
	POETIC	EXPRESSIVE	INFORMATIVE	PERSUASIVE
I. finding the meaning of a word in context	19, 20, 21, 22, 23		26, 34, 39, 43	
II. understanding certain idiomatic expressions found in the texts	14	59, 60	27	
III. finding the following elements in a text: character, place, time	12		25, 35, 37	
IV. recognizing the logical sequence in a series of events	13	64		
V. finding the main and secondary ideas in a text			28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 40	
VI. finding the information in a text, which supports or refutes a statement	24	62	38, 44	5, 6
VII. perceiving cause and effect relationships	11	61, 63	36, 42	
VIII. identifying and evaluating character traits, reactions, and motives of different characters	15, 16, 17, 18	45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51		
IX. distinguishing fact from opinion		53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58		7, 8, 9
X. drawing conclusions and deducing	10	52, 65	41	
XI. reading tables, graphs, charts, and schedules				1, 2, 3, 4, 66, 67, 68

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

The written comprehension test was developed by following a number of steps in order to ensure its validity (1) and reliability (2).

Objectives and evaluation context

The written comprehension test was to measure the extent to which the curriculum objectives of the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 4e, 5e et 6e années, document provisoire, had been met. **This curriculum includes one general objective and 50 specific objectives related to reading comprehension.** It was, therefore, impossible to evaluate all aspects of reading comprehension as described in the curriculum. **It was necessary to choose the objectives which best represented the orientation advocated by the curriculum.**

The committee retained the eleven objectives which seemed to provide the best support for the general objective and lead to its achievement. In addition, the committee chose texts which included the different types of messages.

Once the objectives and texts were chosen, the committee developed items based on Bloom's taxonomy.[3]

Pilot testing

In the spring of 1987, the test was validated in four Franco-Manitoban schools (rural and urban) among 100 students (25% of the population).

Reliability

The reliability of the test was calculated using the Diederich formula[4], which produced a coefficient of 0.91; the test therefore has a high degree of reliability.

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1 Validity: characteristic of an instrument which accurately measures everything it claims to measure, and no more. Definition taken from Government of Quebec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Lexique, no. 2 of Éléments de docimologie (Québec: Direction générale du développement pédagogique, 1984) p. 35.

2 Reliability: characteristic of a measurement instrument the results of which are stable for the same subjects observed under identical conditions at different times. Definition taken from Lexique, p. 14.

3 Marc-André Nadeau. L'évaluation des programmes d'études. (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1981), p. 231-298.

4 The Diederich Formula is a modification of the Kuder-Richardson formula 21. Dominique Morissette, La Mesure et l'évaluation en enseignement (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1984), p. 61 et 62.

CORRECTION

All copies of the written comprehension test were marked by university students who were hired and trained by the Bureau de l'éducation française.

RESULTS OF WRITTEN COMPREHENSION TEST

This section includes:

- the provincial results
- the interpretation of results for each sub-test;
  - the procedure followed to interpret the results;
  - the synthesis of the interpretation of results.

In all cases, the results are group results for all students in Franco-Manitoban schools; 413 students wrote the written comprehension test.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

Average performance per sub-test and overall

The number of students used to calculate the provincial average was 413.

SUB-TESTS		Number of items per objective	Mean Raw Score	Percentage (%)
	TEST TOTAL	68	52.67	77.45
I.	finding the meaning of a word in context	9	7.04	78.21
II.	understanding certain idiomatic expressions found in the texts	4	2.88	72.03
III.	finding the following elements in a text: character, place, time	4	3.22	80.39
IV.	recognizing the logical sequence in a series of events	2	1.27	63.44
V.	finding the main and secondary ideas in a text	7	5.67	80.94
VI.	finding the information in a text, which supports or refutes a statement	6	3.60	60.01
VII.	perceiving cause and effect relationships	5	3.54	70.80
VIII.	identifying and evaluating character traits, reactions, and motives of different characters	11	9.22	83.82
IX.	distinguishing fact from opinion	9	7.64	84.91
X.	drawing conclusions and deducing	4	2.88	71.91
XI.	reading tables, graphs, charts and schedules.	7	5.72	81.67

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

PROCEDURE FOLLOWED TO INTERPRET RESULTS

The Technical Committee established two levels of performance: ACCEPTABLE and DESIRABLE.

ACCEPTABLE level of performance: The committee determined the minimum percentage of students in the province who would have to answer correctly in order to consider the results satisfactory. If the percentage of students who succeeded was below the minimum level, the results would be considered unsatisfactory.

DESIRABLE level of performance: The committee determined the percentage of students which it hoped would answer correctly. In other words, it aimed for the ideal. According to the committee, the results would be considered excellent if they achieved or surpassed this level.

The "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance were different for each of the eleven sub-tests.

When the members of the committee were unable to agree on the "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance, the different points of view were taken into consideration and expectations established on the basis of a consensus among the committee members. However, it should be noted that **teachers might establish "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance for their classes that are different from those established by the committee and that they would be justified in doing so.** The committee believes that teachers are the experts with respect to their students and are therefore in the best position to determine the degree of satisfaction with the results achieved by their students. Thus, the comments of the committee members serve to enlighten and guide the thought process. Although the interpretation of the results by the committee is valid for students throughout the province overall, it cannot be applied with any accuracy to each individual class in the province.

After having established the "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance the committee compared them to the actual results. The committee then used the interpretation scale which appears on the following page in order to determine their degree of satisfaction with the results.

SYNTHESIS OF THE INTERPRETATON OF RESULTS

Detailed analyses for each sub-test appear in the Final Report. This Summary Report contains only the following synthesis.

THE SCALE USED TO INTERPRET RESULTS		SUB-TESTS
5 EXCELLENT COMMAND	The actual results are at or above the DESIRABLE level. The committee is very satisfied.	VIII. identifying and evaluating character traits, reactions, and motives of different characters IX. distinguishing fact from opinion
4 VERY GOOD COMMAND	The actual results are slightly above acceptable level, but below desirable level. The committee is satisfied.	II. understanding certain idiomatic expressions found in the texts V. finding the main and secondary ideas in a text VII. perceiving cause and effect relationships XI. reading tables, graphs, charts, and schedules
3 GOOD COMMAND	The actual results are ACCEPTABLE. The committee is satisfied.	I. finding the meaning of a word in context III. finding the following elements in a text: character, place, time VI. finding the information in a text, which supports or refutes a statement X. drawing conclusions and deducing
2 FAIR COMMAND	The actual results are slightly below the acceptable level, although not entirely unacceptable. The committee is not satisfied.	
1 INSUFFICIENT COMMAND	The actual results are far below the acceptable level. The committee is not satisfied.	
DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE	It is difficult to interpret the results due to the small number of items.	IV. recognizing the logical sequence in a series of events

In general, the students demonstrated a very good command of the objectives evaluated by the written comprehension test.

The interpretation of results led to recommendations which can be found on page 7.

RESULTS OF SURVEY COMPLETED BY STUDENTS FOLLOWING THE WRITTEN COMPREHENSION TEST

A survey was included at the end of the written comprehension test.

The data from the survey provided some insight into the reading habits of grade 6 students and their thoughts on French in general.

The majority of grade 6 students:

- found the test easy;
- speak French at home (although only a slim majority);
- like reading in French somewhat;
- think it is easy to read in French;
- read in French at least once a week;
- like to read comics;
- read either for information purposes or for leisure.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE Reading Assessment included two components: a test to measure the extent to which the curriculum objectives are being met, and a survey to provide some information on grade 6 students.

The test results were published by the Bureau de l'éducation française in October 1988 in the Preliminary Report. The Bureau de l'éducation française also established a committee to study and interpret the results. This committee, which met throughout the 1988-89 school year, adopted a procedure which enabled them to determine their degree of satisfaction with respect to each of the objectives evaluated by the test. The committee indicated their satisfaction on the basis of a scale comprised of six levels: excellent command (5), very good command (4), good command (3), fair command (2), insufficient command (1) and difficult to determine. Their work led to the following conclusions.

The students have an excellent command of the following objectives:

- identifying and evaluating character traits, reactions and motives of different characters;
- distinguishing fact from opinion.

The students have a very good command of the following objectives:

- understanding certain idiomatic expressions found in the texts;
- finding the main and secondary ideas in a text;
- perceiving cause and effect relationships;
- reading tables, graphs, charts and schedules.

The students have a good command of the following objectives:

- finding the meaning of a word in context;
- finding the following elements in a text: character, place and time;
- finding the information in a text which supports or refutes a statement;
- drawing conclusions and deducing.

However, the interpretation of the results for one of the objectives "recognizing the logical sequence of a series of events" was difficult to determine because of the small number of items in the test.

In general, the students demonstrated a very good command of the objectives evaluated by the reading assessment test. The students, as well as all those who helped them achieve these objectives, deserve congratulations.

The committee is satisfied because, in their opinion, each of the objectives included in the test was important. The curriculum objectives are closely linked: they all promote the development of reading skills through communication situations. The students' good command of ten of the eleven objectives suggests that their reading comprehension is very good.

It is important, however, to recall the limits of the assessment. When we say that the students have mastered ten objectives, it is important to add that the objectives were achieved with respect to the texts and questions included in the test. The texts used in the test were representative of the type of reading that grade 6 students at a Franco-Manitoban school should be able to understand. It is not possible to ascertain whether the objectives would have been achieved if the students had been given texts of a different nature. It is also important not to conclude that these objectives require no more work. On the contrary, these objectives were studied well before the sixth grade and must be pursued at the high school level. Essentially, the objectives will remain the same, however, the complexity and degree of abstraction required for the texts will be different from one year to the next.

Although the test provided information on the degree to which the curriculum objectives are being met, it also raised certain concerns. While interpreting the results, the committee studied each of the items for each objective. Although the students had a good command of ten of the eleven objectives, the committee cannot affirm that the students were successful for each of the items. In fact, the committee noticed some weaknesses among grade 6 students:

- a number of students seem to read words and sentences in an isolated manner; they do not always put the information they have been given back in the context of the paragraph or text as a whole;

- a number of students seem to have difficulty establishing links between two pieces of information provided in the text;

- a number of students do not always refer back to the information contained in the text; they seem to rely more on personal knowledge;

- a number of students seem to have difficulties comprehending texts containing elaborate syntax or vocabulary ("Nuit blanche" and "La Veillée");

- a number of students do not seem to do as well when they are required to provide the answer themselves;

- a number of students seem to have difficulty evaluating information.

One might ask what these weaknesses are due to? Why do a number of students not refer back to the text? Why do they not seem to do as well if they have to analyse, synthesize and evalute? How advanced are they with respect to each of the components of Bloom's taxonomy?

In order to help the students improve their performance, it is recommended that:

- teachers continue to use varied strategies in order to insure that students reflect upon what they read;

- teachers continue to give students assignments for each of the objectives, which will help them master all the levels of Bloom's taxonomy; knowing, understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating. Among the activities which students should be given are those that encourage them to refer back to the text and to:
  . put the words and sentences back in the context provided by the text,
  . look for links between the ideas presented in the text,
  . compare personal knowledge with the information provided in the text,
  . make judgements of what they have read;

- teachers continue to teach syntax and vocabulary, not in an isolated manner, but in connection with a text;

- students be required not only to choose answers but also to frequently provide them.

Other recommendations were based on either the questionnaire completed by the students following the test or the evaluation context. **It is strongly recommended that teachers continue to:**

- use texts which deal with subjects that motivate the students in order to continue to develop their interest in reading;

- use varied strategies with the aim of bringing the students to enjoy reading;

- use authentic and varied documents in a context which is significant to the students;

- have silent reading periods during which the students can choose what they would like to read;

- give students ample opportunity to discuss their reading with each other.

In order to support teachers and students in their efforts, **it is recommended that:**

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to provide workshops on the development of reading skills, on the basis of requests from the school divisions;

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to test pedagogical material;

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to inform teachers with regard to magazines, books and other available documents;

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to involve teachers in the development of support material;

- school divisions continue to provide teachers with access to information and training on methods of reading and available documentation;

- school divisions continue to assist teachers with the implementation of reading methods which reflect the philosophy of the curriculum;

- school divisions continue to facilitate access to a rich and varied source of reading material through a variety of activities such as encouraging students to subscribe to magazines which are of interest to them, and ensuring that school libraries are well stocked;

- faculties of education continue to ensure that courses which are offered during initial training as well as subsequent upgrading, correspond with the methods of reading recommended in the curriculum;

- faculties of education continue to promote research projects on reading.

The recommendations are not in order of priority. All the suggested activities are aimed at developing reading skills. Promoting one type of activity over another would not be wise. In addition, we must emphasize the importance of respecting the philosophy of the curriculum. It requires that students be placed in significant and authentic communication situations. Thus, the students will develop the ability to read different types of messages which will enable them to fulfill their personal and social communication needs. The orientation proposed by the curriculum provides a very broad and rich spectrum of learning contexts. Among other things, it requires that teachers use the students' experiences to initiate the learning process and also that teachers ensure active student participation in this process.

WRITING ASSESSMENT

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION CONTEXT

The writing skills test placed the students in a context similar to one which they might encounter in a real life situation. The students were to organize a year end party and were to submit a text explaining the day's activities.

During the assessment, the students were to:

1. receive explanations relating to

- the setting of the stage, in order to spark their interest in the subject and trigger the thinking process,
- the duration of the test,
- the writing assignment which provided the parameters that the students were to respect (their intentions, the referent, the receptor, the context),
- the instructions dealing with the length of the text, draft copy, revision, final copy as well as the use of reference materials such as dictionnaries and grammar books;

2. write the text by means of

- a draft copy,
- a revision completed using a worksheet, to enable the students to think about the text and improve it,
- a final copy;

3. complete a survey.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

Criteria and evaluation context

The test was to measure the extent to which the curriculum objectives with respect to writing skills set out in the Programme d'études, FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 4e, 5e et 6e années, document provisoire are being met.

In order to respect the general objective and guiding principles of the curriculum, the committee responsible for the development of the test made three choices:

- to place the students in a communication context similar to that which they might encounter in a real life situation,
- to choose circumstances for the writing assignment which enabled the students to use more than one type of message.

- to develop criteria which take into account the objectives of writing skills.

Development of evaluation context

The committee developed an evaluation context which included: an introduction, a writing assignment, instructions and a student worksheet developed on the basis of the criteria.

Pilot testing

In the spring of 1987, the test and the questionnaire-survey were validated in four Franco-Manitoban schools (rural and urban) including 100 students (25% of the population).

Reliability of the test

The reliability of the writing skills test was calculated using the Diederich formula[1], which produced a coefficient of 0.79. The test therefore seems to have a high level of reliability.

CORRECTION

CRITERIA

An analytical scale containing ten criteria was used to evaluate the students' texts.

For each criterion, four qualitative descriptors relating to student performance were established and a value was attached to each. The possible total was 100.

The number of points for each criterion was not the same. This was done to illustrate the importance of each criterion with respect to the communication situation. Thus, the first criterion "Choice of information" was given the greatest number of points: 20.

By assigning a value to each of the four descriptors, it was possible to calculate the students' average performance for each of the criteria, as well as for the test as a whole (see test results, page 17).

In addition, the percentage of students achieving the level of quality for each descriptor was established. This distribution of students based on the analytical scale's descriptors provided the committee with a clearer idea of the students' writing abilities (see test results, page 17).

TEST MARKERS

Le Bureau de l'éducation française hired and trained markers to correct the students' texts.

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[1] The Diederich formula is a modification of Kuder-Richardson's formula 21. Dominique Morissette, La mesure et l'évaluation en enseignement, p. 61.

WRITING ASSESSMENT - Grade 6 - French as a first language

ANALYTICAL SCALE

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATIONS	DESCRIPTORS A	B	C	D	MARK
Choice of information	1. The text includes the necessary information with respect to the organization of the celebration (activities, details, guests). NOTE: Adequacy refers to the quantity of information; relevancy refers to the quality and usefulness of information.	More than adequate relevant information included. 20	Adequate relevant information included. 15	Insufficient relevant information or inclusion of some irrelevant information. 10	Clearly insufficient relevant information or inclusion of considerable amount of irrelevant information. 5	/20
Choice of vocabulary	2. Vocabulary is precise and varied.	Vocabulary is precise, varied, and nuanced; well adapted to the writing project. 8	Vocabulary is precise; very little misinterpretation and ambiguity; little unnecessary repetition; very few anglicisms. 6	Vocabulary is sometimes imprecise or inappropriate; generally poor; unnecessary repetition; some anglicisms. 4	Vocabulary is imprecise and inappropriate; generally very poor; a lot of unnecessary repetition; a number of anglicisms. 2	/8
Textual coherence	3. The text is coherent. More specifically: a) the information is logically grouped; b) connecting words appropriately used both within and between sentences; c) pronouns and indicators of time and place are identifiable, that is to say that the text contains the information required by the reader to determine who and what is being written about.	Information grouped logically; connecting words always used appropriately; referents always identifiable. 12	Information logically grouped; some connecting words inappropriately used; some referents difficult to identify. 9	Information scattered; some connecting words inappropriately used; some referents difficult to identify. 6	Considerable amount of information scattered; a number of connecting words inappropriately used; a number of referents difficult to identify. 3	/12

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATIONS	DESCRIPTORS A	B	C	D	MARK
Paragraphing	4. The text is divided as follows: - introduction - development of ideas - conclusion	All of the elements are included in the text and paragraphing is always appropriate. 8	All of the elements are included in the text and paragraphing is generally appropriate. 6	Almost all of the elements are included in the text and paragraphing is generally appropriate. All of the elements are included in text and paragraphing is not very appropriate. 4	A number of elements are not included in the text and paragraphing is not very appropriate. 2	/8
Sentence structure	5. Simple, compound, and complex sentences are well constructed: - all words are included and in the right place; - no unnecessary words; - no oral structures; - no English structures.	All sentences are well constructed. 12	Almost all sentences are well constructed: only some present a problem. 9	A number of sentences present a problem. 6	The majority of sentences present a problem. 3	/12
Punctuation	6. The following punctuation marks are used adequately: periods, capitals, question marks, and commas used to separate items in a series.	Always 0-2 errors 8	Almost always 3-5 errors 6	Often 6-8 errors 4	Rarely 9 or more errors 2	/8
Spelling	7. Words representing a level of difficulty appropriate for grade six students and words studied in class are spelled correctly. NOTE: If uncertain, consult spelling list.	Always 0-2 errors 12	Almost always 3-5 errors 9	Often 6-8 errors 6	Rarely 9 or more errors 3	/12

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATIONS	DESCRIPTORS A	B	C	D	MARK
Agreements	8. Agreements in number and gender are correctly applied (agreements included in curriculum only).	Always 0-2 errors 8	Almost always 3-5 errors 6	Often 6-8 errors 4	Rarely 9 or more errors 2	/8
Verb Conjugation and Agreement	9. Verb endings are correctly applied (verbs included in curriculum only).	Always 0-2 errors 8	Almost always 3-5 errors 6	Often 6-8 errors 4	Rarely 9 or more errors 2	/8
Homophones	10. Homophones are correctly used.	Always 0-2 errors 4	Almost always 3-5 errors 3	Often 6-8 errors 2	Rarely 9 or more errors 1	/4
					TOTAL	/100

RESULTS OF WRITING SKILLS TEST

This section includes:

- the provincial results;
- the interpretation of results for each criterion:
  - . the procedure followed to interpret the results,
  - . the synthesis of the interpretation of results.

In all cases, the results are group results for all students in Franco-Manitoban schools; 408 students participated in the writing skills test.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

The table on the following page provides the results obtained by the students who participated in the assessment. The first half of the table (left side) indicates the average performance of the students for each of the criteria. The second half of the table (right side) provides the students' percentile distribution based on the descriptors of the analytical scale.

Provincial Results of Writing Assessment Test

Item Number	CRITERIA	Average performance per criterion (N = 408) POINTS GIVEN FOR EACH CRITERION	MEAN RAW SCORE	PERCENT	Students' percentile distribution based on the descriptors of the analytical scale. A	B	C	D	NR*
	TEST TOTAL	100	67,80	67,80					
101	I. Choice of information	20	11,47	57,35	2,7	38,5	42,9	14,8	1,2
102	II. Choice of vocabulary	8	5,51	68,89	1,5	73,6	22,3	1,7	1,0
103	III. Textual coherence	12	7,72	64,36	4,4	51,3	40,2	3,1	1,0
104	IV. Paragraphing	8	5,35	66,93	7,0	57,1	30,8	4,1	1,0
105	V. Sentence structure	12	5,66	47,19	0,0	22,0	43,8	33,2	1,0
106	VI. Punctuation	8	7,43	92,85	76,3	18,4	3,1	1,2	1,0
107	VII. Spelling	12	8,40	69,99	32,9	30,3	18,9	16,9	1,0
108	VIII. Agreements	8	6,31	78,85	43,8	34,4	13,1	7,7	1,0
109	IX. Verb Conjugation and Agreement	8	6,22	77,81	39,0	38,0	16,2	5,8	1,0
110	X. Homophones	4	3,66	91,44	74,8	16,7	5,3	2,2	1,0

* NR: No response, that is to say, the students who did not participate in the writing assessment and those who submitted copies which were impossible to correct.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

PROCEDURE FOLLOWED TO INTERPRET RESULTS

The committee responsible for the data interpretation established two levels of performance: ACCEPTABLE and DESIRABLE.

ACCEPTABLE level of performance: The committee determined the minimum percentage of students in the province who would have to achieve quality levels A and B in order to consider the results satisfactory. If the percentage of students who succeeded was below the minimum level, the results would be considered unsatisfactory.

DESIRABLE level of performance: The committee determined the percentage of students which it hoped would achieve quality levels A and B. In other words, it aimed for the ideal. According to the committee, the results would be considered excellent if they achieved or surpassed this level.

The "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance were different for each of the ten sub-tests.

When the members of the committee were unable to agree on the "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance, the different points of view were taken into consideration and expectations established on the basis of a consensus among the committee members. However, it should be noted that **teachers might establish "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance for their classes that are different from those established by the committee and that they would be justified in doing so.** The committee believes that teachers are the experts with respect to their students and are therefore in the best position to determine the degree of satisfaction with the results achieved by the students. Thus, the comments of the committee members serve to enlighten and guide the thought process. Although the interpretation of the results by the committee is valid for students throughout the province overall, it cannot be applied with any accuracy to each individual class in the province.

After having established the "acceptable" and "desirable" levels of performance the committee compared them to the actual results. The committee then used the interpretation scale which appears on the following page in order to determine its degree of satisfaction with the results.

SYNTHESIS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Detailed analyses for each criterion appear in the Final Report. This Summary Report contains only the following synthesis.

THE SCALE USED TO INTERPRET RESULTS		CRITERIA
5 EXCELLENT COMMAND	The actual results are at or above the DESIRABLE level. The committee is very satisfied.	. Punctuation . Conjugation and agreement of verbs
4 VERY GOOD COMMAND	The actual results are slightly above the acceptable level, but below desirable level. The committee is satisfied.	. Choice of vocabulary . Textual coherence . Agreements . Homophones
3 GOOD COMMAND	The actual results are ACCEPTABLE. The committee is satisfied.	. Choice of information . Paragraphing . Spelling
2 FAIR COMMAND	The actual results are slightly below the acceptable level, although not entirely unacceptable. The committee is not satisfied.	
1 INSUFFICIENT COMMAND	The actual results are far below the acceptable level. The committee is not satisfied.	. Sentence structure

Recommendations made on the basis of the interpretation of results can be found on page 20.

RESULTS OF SURVEY COMPLETED BY STUDENTS FOLLOWING THE WRITING SKILLS TEST

The survey and the data obtained can be found in the Final Report. This data is particularly interesting; it does not represent facts, but indicates the students' perception of the test, their writing skills and their working habits.

The majority of grade 6 students:

- found the test easy,
- consulted reference works at least once,
- speak French at home (although only a slim majority),
- like writing in French somewhat,
- find it easy to write in French,
- write French texts at least once a week or more; a good number of students write in French almost every day.

In general, this picture of grade 6 students is far from being negative.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As in the case of the Reading Assessment, the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE Writing Assessment included two components: the test, which measured the extent to which the objectives of the curriculum are being met, and the survey, which provided information regarding the students.

The test results were studied by a committee responsible for interpreting the data. The procedure used to interpret the results of the writing assessment was similar to the one used in the case of the reading assessment. However, the "acceptable" and "desirable" performances were not compared with the average performance of students, but rather with the total percentage of students who had achieved levels A and B of the descriptors.

In fact, the use of descriptors is one of the strenghts of this evaluation. For each of the evaluated criteria, four levels of performance were established: A, B, C and D. All students who achieved level A or B of a criterion were said to have mastered this criterion.

The use of the descriptors during the correction process enabled the committee to obtain a good picture of the students' abilities.

Once the results were studied, the committee determined its degree of satisfaction with each of the criteria. Their work led to the following conclusions:

The students have an excellent command of the following criteria:
- punctuation,
- conjugation of verbs.

The students have a very good command of the following criteria:
- choice of vocabulary,
- coherence of text,
- agreements,
- homophones.

The students have a good command of the following criteria:
- choice of information,
- paragraphing,
- spelling.

However, the students have an insufficient command of the following criteria:
- sentence structure.

The analysis of the ten criteria leads us to conclude that, overall, the students have a good command of the objectives evaluated by the writing skills test.

This conclusion is valid solely with respect to the writing assignment given to the students during the test. This test measured the extent to which the objectives had been met in a single set of circumstances. It is quite possible that the students' results might have been different had the writing assignment been different. However, this test sheds some light on the students' skills to write under a given set of circumstances which they might also encounter in life.

Although the students did well on the writing assignment, we wondered why they had difficulty with sentence structure. What importance should be given to the fact that 41,8% of the students speak mainly English at home? Is there too much interference? What pedagogical strategies might prevent the problems observed with respect to sentence structure?

The following recommendations are based on the interpretation of the May 1988 test results, as well as the data obtained through the survey. They take into account the students' strenghts and weaknesses as well as new pedagogical methods which promote the integrated development of language skills.

Given the students' strenghts, it is recommended that teachers continue to:

- set the stage at the beginning of the writing process so that students will write with the purpose of communicating,

- choose significant and authentic projects,

- emphasize the importance of writing,

- encourage students to go over what they have written; to reread and question their texts, to revise their texts using the appropriate reference works and to make any necessary changes,

- give the students frequent opportunities to write thereby ensuring that they use the skills they have acquired,

- gather information concerning the learning objectives to be pursued,

- recognize and utilize productively the relation that exists between the oral and the written, as well as between comprehension and production so that students can benefit from the knowledge and skills they have acquired in different learning contexts.

In order for a greater number of students to be able to construct their sentences properly, it is recommended that teachers:

- do not accept to be the interpreters of what students have written, but rather encourage them to clarify their messages,

- continue to be models and introduce other models to the students by inviting various authors and resource people to class,

- continue to encourage students to experiment with sentence structure both orally and in writing as explained in Appendix VII of the curriculum: "Les opérations linguistiques",

- continue to make students aware of the importance of using what they learn in every day situations.

In order for students to improve their writing skills with respect to all the criteria included in the analytical scale, **it is recommended that:**

- teachers have the opportunity to meet with each other in order to discuss strategies which should be implemented; in particular that all the elements of the writing process be discussed:

  . **pre-writing** (setting the stage, presentation of the subject, discussion of the subject, development of semantic fields, categories and plans, all help the students to choose the information (the content) and suggest ways of writing their information (form),

  . **self-correction, group correction, revision worksheets, teacher/student meetings**: returning to the text in order to examine and evaluate one's work shifts the responsibility for improving writing skills to the student; the teacher becomes more of a guide who helps students succeed; the teacher is no longer simply a proof-reader who ensures that the text is acceptable before being distributed or published,

. **reference materials:** the students must become independent because their teachers will not always be there to guide them.

- teachers continue to use the writing process in accordance with the pedagogical process proposed in the curriculum, and continue to recognize that such a process incorporates correct grammar in the communication process.

In order to support teachers in their efforts, it is recommended that:

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to offer workshops on the writing process, in response to requests from the school divisions,

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to inform teachers of available pedagogical material,

- the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to involve teachers in the development of material aimed at developing writing skills,

- school divisions continue to promote exchange among teachers,

- school divisions continue to assist teachers in implementing the writing process in accordance with the pedagogical process proposed in the curriculum,

- faculties of education continue to ensure that courses which are offered during initial training as well as subsequent upgrading, correspond to the writing process recommended in the curriculum.

- faculties of education continue to promote research projects on writing skills.

TEACHER SURVEY

In order to achieve one of the intended goals of the evaluation project, which was to "collect data in order to improve the curriculum", a survey was sent to all grade 6 French teachers. The response rate was 73.08%: nineteen of the twenty-six teachers completed the survey although they did not necessarily answer all questions. The number of teachers who responded is indicated at the end of each question. All the percentages indicated were calculated on the basis of the total number of surveys returned: 19.

N.B.: The number of respondents is indicated as follows for each question: R: n/19.

1. Do you use the curriculum as the basis from which to teach French? (R: 19/19)

Over 80% consult the curriculum, ranging from once a month to once a week. The others consult it occasionally.

2. How many inservice days have you had to be informed and trained with respect to the curriculum since 1980? (R: 19/19)

48% had between 3 and 5 days of training; 47% had between 1 and 2 days and only 5% had none at all.

3. Indicate in order of priority the professional training activities which have served to train you or inform you about the curriculum. (R: 15/19)

Despite the high number of respondents who did not answer all aspects of this question, implementation sessions organized by the B.E.F. and program support sessions organized at the local or regional level, as well as the testing of pedagogical material are considered to be valid activities.

4. Indicate the percentage (approximately) of time alloted in class to each of the components of the curriculum. (R: 16/19)

More time seems to be given to reading and writing skills than to oral skills.

5. Indicate in order of difficulty, the components of the curriculum (listening, reading, speaking, writing) which are more difficult and those which are easier to teach. (R: 18/19)

Writing skills are perceived as being more difficult to teach.

6. Indicate in order of difficulty, the components of the curriculum (listening, reading, speaking, writing) which are more difficult and those which are easier to evaluate. (R: 18/19)

Listening and speaking skills are perceived as being most difficult to evaluate.

7. Do you feel that you have received sufficient pedagogical upgrading to teach grade 6 French on the basis of the curriculum? If so, answer questions no. 8-12; if not, answer only question 13. (R: 16/19)

68.42% (13/19) answered YES. The remainder answered NO or did not respond.

8. Indicate in order of difficulty the type of message which is most difficult to work with in achieving the objectives of the curriculum. (R:13/19)

Expressive and poetic types of messages seem to pose the most problems.

9. Are the parents of the students you teach aware of the orientation proposed in the Français langue maternelle curriculum? (R: 12/19)

The answers of those respondents who felt that they had received sufficient pedagogical upgrading seem to indicate that the parents are aware of the orientation proposed in the Français langue maternelle curriculum.

10. Do/Would the parents who are aware of the orientation of the French curriculum simplify the teaching of French in your class? (R: 13/19)

The answers of those respondents who felt that they had received sufficient pedagogical upgrading seem to indicate that parents who are aware of the orientation of the curriculum would/does simplify the instruction of French in their class.

11. Are you satisfied with the curriculum for grade six French? (R: 12/19)

The majority of those respondents who felt that they had received sufficient pedagogical upgrading seem satisfied with the curriculum.

12. Identify two ways of improving the instruction of French within the scope of the curriculum: (R: 9/19)

Comments made by teachers:

- Develop and refine the use of various strategies.
- Increase my knowledge of the communicative approach.
- Hold workshops on a number of consecutive days to study the curriculum and method, and do activities to better understand them.
- Not be afraid to approach the B.E.F. consultants.
- Not change the manual that comes with the curriculum every three years.
- Have a grammar chart that the students could keep from one year to the next.
- We need help in organizing our material to follow the curriculum more closely. When we follow a series we do not necessarily follow the curriculum.
- Include Graficor: Systèmes textbooks in the curriculum.
- Include a small grammar book such as Cours d'orthographe by E. & O. Bled in the curriculum.
- Have analytical scales especially for oral skills.
- Have examples of courses to teach oral communication.
- Have a chart to summarize all the concepts (e.g: grammar, homophones, etc.) which must be taught at each level.
- Have videos of model classes.
- Have days to share and exchange ideas especially for aural comprehension, oral production and evaluation.
- Include (more specifically) the main sources of confusion in language structure (French-English).
- Suggest library books that will interest students at their particular level. In English, they adore adventure and mystery books. If only we could have those books in French at a reasonable price!
- Have inservice days with specialists or with suppliers of materials which relate to the curriculum.
- Have exercises which promote the instruction of verbs using the different persons without mixing up all the different tenses, which is the case with the grammar books available to us.
- I think it is the responsibility of the BEF in collaboration with the Institut pédagogique, to resolve one problem without delay: the lack of linguistic competence from which numerous graduates of the Institut suffer.
- It would have been preferable to have a writing skills test which evaluated more than one type of writing.

13. If you feel that you have not received enough professional training to teach grade 6 French on the basis of the curriculum, how would you like to receive this training? (R: 3:19)

Those teachers who indicated that they had not received enough professional training stated that they would especially like to receive training by means of implementation sessions organized by the BEF.

CONCLUSION OF REPORT

In the first chapter of this Summary Report, we set out the goals of the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE Reading and Writing Assessment. Were these goals achieved? In the following pages, **these goals** are reviewed and commented upon.

Provide the Department of Education and Training Manitoba, the public and educators, with information on the extent to which the objectives of the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 4^{e}, 5^{e} et 6^{e} années, version provisoire, 1986, curriculum have been met.

The analysis and interpretation of the students' results have enabled us to conclude that, in general:

- grade six students have a very good command of the objectives evaluated by means of the written comprehension test,

- grade six students have a good command of the objectives evaluated by means of the writing skills test.

The tests provide a positive picture of the students. In varying degrees, they have mastered all the objectives with respect to reading and writing skills, with the exception of that which deals with sentence structure. The recommendations encourage the Bureau de l'éducation française, the school divisions, teachers and faculties of education to work together in order to help the students continue to develop their reading and writing skills within authentic and significant communication contexts. In particular, the themes given to the students will have to continue to reflect the experience, interests and needs of the students in order to ensure that their learning is relevant. In addition, the pedagogical method proposed in the curriculum should continue to be respected.

Gather data which will help improve the curriculum.

The reading and writing assessment enabled us to collect data by means of tests and surveys.

The data gathered from the tests and surveys completed by the students helped us better understand the strenghts and weaknesses of students and better identify their needs, enabling us to make certain recommendations. The data was made available to the curriculum consultant responsible for the development of the 1989 curriculum. We would like to add that the results of the tests and surveys are only one of many sources of information which helped to improve the curriculum. In particular, the work completed by the curriculum development committee was the cornerstone in the preparation of the official curriculum which is an extension of the 1986 draft version used during the development of the tests.

> The draft version emphasized that language is a communication tool, and included a balance in the development of listening, reading, writing and speaking. The 1989 document was conceived on the basis of this idea; however, its objective is also the integrated development of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). In addition, the curriculum includes the various functions of communication."[1]

Although the 1989 curriculum promotes new pedagogical methods which favour the whole language approach, it also retained the same general objectives as those found in the 1986 draft version. The recommendations contained in this report support these general objectives and also take into account the new pedagogical approaches.

While the tests and surveys done by the students provided useful information, the same is true for the survey completed by teachers. This survey did not only deal with the written component but also the oral component of the curriculum. In addition, the survey was also intended to identify some of teachers' needs.

The survey data indicates that the majority of teachers who responded to the survey use the curriculum often and seem to appreciate the professional training activities which are currently available. However, they seem to want more help with the instruction of writing skills and the evaluation of oral skills.

In responding to the survey, 68.42% of teachers indicated that they had received sufficient pedagogical training to teach the program on the basis of the curriculum. In this group, the vast majority of teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the curriculum. We can therefore assume that they are also satisfied with the new 1989 version. However, we observed that this group would appreciate additional assistance, especially with respect to the instruction of the expressive and poetic types of messages. The teachers also made a number of suggestions with respect to the improvement of French language instruction. A number of comments support the recommendations found at the end of the chapters on reading comprehension and writing skills and demonstrate the teachers' interest in developing good written and oral communication skills. In addition, among the comments were a number of requests for additional assistance, either with support material or with professional development activities. The requests for assistance from teachers is not surprising given that 52% of teachers had two days or less of professional development. Although one or two days is useful to initiate teachers to the orientation emphasized in the curriculum, we believe that this is insufficient to enable them to make full use of the curriculum's potential.

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[1] Translation of a paragraph from the introduction of Programme d'études FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE, 1re à la 6e année, version officielle (Winnipeg: Bureau de l'éducation française, 1989), p. 2.

Given that those teachers who indicated that they had received sufficient pedagogical training to teach French on the basis of the curriculum would like assistance, we can assume that there is an even greater need among those who did not receive sufficient pedagogical training. The school divisions must therefore continue to promote access to training and the Bureau de l'éducation française must continue to offer, upon request, pedagogical training sessions.

Promote or sustain an interest in a quality language of communication among students, parents, educators and school administrators.

Written French is important to Franco-Manitobans. As evidence of this fact, we mention the organization of events such as the "Colloque des écrivains en herbe", les "Rats de Bibliothèque", as well as the many efforts made by teachers and students at the local level: school papers, collections of texts written by students, reading periods, correspondence with other students, etc.

In addition, as already mentioned, teachers have provided suggestions which demonstrate their willingness to work on developing a quality language of communication. We believe, therefore, that the provincial assessment served to sustain an interest which was already very strong.

Help teachers improve their student evaluation skills.

All grade six French teachers administered the tests themselves. They were, therefore, exposed to examples of instruments which can be used in order to measure the extent to which the objectives of the curriculum are met. These tools are now available to them.

As well, a number of teachers sat on the Technical Committee and indicated that this experience had been beneficial to them.

Inform school divisions, upon request, of the extent to which the curriculum objectives have been met in their schools.

The school divisions which made requests to this effect, received the students' results. It is still possible to request the results from the person responsible for this project at the Bureau de l'éducation française.

These observations lead us to conclude that the goals have been met or are in the process of being met. However, we feel it is important to recall the limitations of the assessment. Reading and writing are complex means of communication. No single test or survey could provide all the necessary information concerning the students' reading and writing skills. However, the assessment project did shed some light on the development of these skills.

The Technical Committee therefore makes the **following recommendation:**

- that the Bureau de l'éducation française continue to evaluate the FRANÇAIS LANGUE MATERNELLE curriculum and that these evaluations continue to involve teachers.

With respect to the immediate future, we encourage the regular use of the present curriculum which is an excellent guide for educators who work at developing language skills in Manitoba's Français langue maternelle programme.

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The following bibliography contains all the works quoted in this Summary Report as well as a selection of other titles which were found to be particularly useful.

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